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# General Assembly
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*Official Records*

77th plenary meeting
Tuesday, 18 January 2005, 10.30 a.m.
New York

*President:* Mr. Ping ..... (Gabon)

*The meeting was called to order at 10.40 a.m.*

**Agenda item 113 (*continued*)**

**Scale of assessments for the apportionment of the expenses of the United Nations (A/59/668)**

**The President** (*spoke in French*): I should like, in keeping with established practice, to draw the attention of the General Assembly to document A/59/668, containing a letter from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the General Assembly, in which he informs the Assembly that 29 Member States are in arrears in the payment of their financial contributions to the United Nations within the terms of Article 19 of the Charter.

I should like to remind delegations that, under Article 19 of the Charter,

> "A Member of the United Nations which is in arrears in the payment of its financial contributions to the Organization shall have no vote in the General Assembly if the amount of its arrears equals or exceeds the amount of the contributions due from it for the preceding two full years."

May I take it that the General Assembly duly takes note of the information contained in document A/59/668?

*It was so decided.*

**Agenda item 8 (*continued*)**

**Organization of work, adoption of the agenda and allocation of items**

**The President** (*spoke in French*): Members will recall that the General Assembly concluded its consideration of agenda item 39 at its 75th plenary meeting, on 22 December 2004. As indicated in the footnote to document A/59/L.58, in order that the Assembly may consider the draft resolution before it, it will be necessary to reopen consideration of agenda item 39. May I take it that the Assembly wishes to resume its consideration of agenda item 39?

*It was so decided.*

**Agenda item 39 (*continued*)**

**Strengthening of the coordination of humanitarian and disaster relief assistance of the United Nations, including special economic assistance**

**Draft resolution (A/59/L.58)**

**The President** (*spoke in French*): In order that the General Assembly may take a speedy decision on the draft resolution, unless I hear any objection I shall take it that the Assembly wishes immediately to proceed to its consideration of agenda item 39.

*It was so decided.*

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**The President** (*spoke in French*): The General Assembly will therefore now consider agenda item 39, entitled "Strengthening of the coordination of humanitarian and disaster relief assistance of the United Nations, including special economic assistance".

The Assembly is today resuming its work in an atmosphere of sorrow following the earthquake and the resulting tsunami that struck South and South-East Asia and part of the coast of Africa along the Indian Ocean on 26 December. According to figures that unfortunately remain provisional, over 175,000 people were killed — half of whom were children — and 1 million persons have been displaced, with 5 million injured and immeasurable ecological damage. I would like to take this opportunity to reiterate my most sincere condolences to the families of the victims, Governments and peoples of the States so tragically affected.

The frequency and scope of catastrophes in recent years — from the Mediterranean to the Caribbean, and from Africa to Asia — now more than ever call upon us to provide assistance, as well as once again attesting to the need to coordinate humanitarian assistance and establish a worldwide early warning mechanism. We should welcome the exceptional manner in which the international community has mobilized itself to deal with the tragedy in the Indian Ocean. I hope that all pledges made will be honoured, with a view to assisting affected countries as they endeavour to recover. I would once again like to welcome the decisive role being played daily by the United Nations to coordinate and manage international humanitarian assistance.

Although it is true that we cannot always predict how nature will change, we can nevertheless today adopt the necessary measures to anticipate changes and manage their destructive effects. In that connection, the World Conference on Disaster Reduction, which opened today in Kobe, Japan, is a timely event.

I am pleased that the draft resolution put forth by the Lao People's Democratic Republic on behalf of the countries of the Association of South-East Asian Nations emphasizes in particular the need to step up our efforts to provide the United Nations with an efficient mechanism to coordinate efforts by the international community to provide emergency humanitarian assistance as well as disaster-related early warning, prevention and mitigation. I am convinced that, by adopting the draft resolution, we will be taking a decisive step towards achieving that essential goal.

I now call on the Secretary-General.

**The Secretary-General**: Let me thank the General Assembly, and in particular the Group of Asian States, for making this meeting possible. Above all, let me once more offer my condolences to the countries affected by the tsunami disaster, and pay tribute to their people for the courage and solidarity they have displayed over the past three weeks. I return from the region proud to be a member of humankind.

On the morning of 26 December 2004, a word that most of us had never used before took on a universal and terrifying meaning. In the space of seven hours, the onslaught of the tsunami had struck 12 countries across two continents. The total death toll now stands at almost 160,000 — half of them children, as we heard the President of the General Assembly note earlier. That figure is likely to rise. At least 27,000 people are still missing. More than 1 million have been displaced. Another million are homeless. Roads, bridges, schools and hospitals have been destroyed or swept away. And let us not forget the thousands of nationals from dozens of other countries around the world who also perished in the tragedy.

I have just returned from a tour of three of the most affected countries: Indonesia, where the cost in human life was by far the most catastrophic; Sri Lanka, which also suffered massive human losses as well as the destruction of key parts of its economy; and the Maldives, where one third of the population was directly affected and several islands have been rendered uninhabitable. I have seen mile after mile of desolation, where once vibrant communities suddenly ceased to exist. I have looked into the eyes of fishermen whose silence expressed their loss as no words could. I have seen families torn asunder, mothers inconsolable, livelihoods gone. But I have also seen examples of the best that humankind has to offer.

The Governments of affected countries moved quickly to do their part, with civil society and the private sector joining forces with them. Communities organized themselves spontaneously, reaching out to their neighbours, without waiting to be told what to do. In Aceh I met displaced persons being sheltered in the best buildings — government houses and schools —

instead of being left to fend for themselves on the margins of society. In Sri Lanka I met families being housed and cared for in a mosque, whatever their religion or ethnicity. In the Maldives I met islanders who had been spared the direct impact of the emergency working day and night to help their fellow islanders in need.

And if that natural disaster was without parallel or precedent, so was the international response. Neighbouring countries, whether affected or not, went to the aid of those hardest hit. Singapore and Malaysia, India and Thailand, provided early and crucial assistance to Indonesia and Sri Lanka, and continue to do so. Governments around the world offered pledges and contributions in an outpouring of compassion. More than 60 countries have pledged assistance so far. The Core Group and other countries with military assets in the region provided essential logistical support for the humanitarian effort.

The United Nations mobilized itself early and quickly. I am sure I speak for all of us in thanking Jan Egeland, the Humanitarian Emergency Relief Coordinator, and Margareta Wahlström, our special coordinator in the region — as well as Carol Bellamy of UNICEF, Jim Morris of the World Food Programme and Ruud Lubbers, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees — for the leadership they have demonstrated since Day One. Above all, I thank our men and women in the field for the wonderful job they are doing in difficult circumstances. Our United Nations country teams, led by the Resident Coordinators, were joined within 24 hours of the disaster by United Nations disaster assessment and coordination teams. They combined their efforts with the Governments affected, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and other non-governmental organizations, as well as with countries deploying military assets.

As part of the response, leaders from the region came together in Jakarta to discuss the relief and reconstruction effort. They agreed that the United Nations should coordinate that work. The Core Group, by unanimous agreement, is being folded into the activities of the United Nations. The collaboration between us has been excellent.

In Jakarta I also launched a flash appeal for $977 million to cover the humanitarian emergency needs of an estimated 5 million people in five countries. In response, there have been generous pledges and, more importantly, some firm commitments. Official pledges now stand at $739 million — more than 75 per cent of what we asked for. I fervently hope those pledges will be converted into cash as soon as possible. There has also been an unprecedented response worldwide from the general public and the private sector, whose contributions now total almost $1 billion.

We are determined to live up to the trust of our donors. PriceWaterhouseCooper is working with us to strengthen existing financial tracking systems and ensure transparency in the use of funds donated for the flash appeal.

Today we can say with some confidence that the humanitarian response is on track. The World Food Programme is feeding more than 300,000 people. The World Health Organization is providing technical support for water, nutrition, sanitation, immunization and women's health, while monitoring for communicable diseases. So far, no major outbreaks have been reported. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees is providing shelter, while UNICEF has shipped tons of educational materials to help children get back to school as quickly as possible.

At the same time, the long-term challenges are considerable. We know from experience that the poor always suffer the most enduring damage from such natural disasters, as their assets are often completely wiped out. We therefore need to focus on longer-term recovery and reconstruction and ensure that from now on there are no gaps in the funding effort.

The World Bank, in collaboration with the United Nations Development Programme and international and regional financial institutions, is already working to determine rehabilitation and reconstruction needs and is exploring ways to address them. As called for at the Jakarta meeting, I will name a special envoy by the end of the week to liaise with Governments in affected countries, ensure coordination of the response and encourage the world community to remain engaged for the longer term.

The generosity and support we have seen over the past few weeks have set a new standard for our global community. It is my hope that we will find a way of capturing this moment, nurturing this spirit and bringing it to bear in other crises around the world. I hope we will unite around it to heal old wounds and

long-running conflicts. I hope we will seize it as an opportunity and a reminder to address other emergencies. I hope we will hold to it as a measure of our humanity.

**The President** (*spoke in French*): With regard to agenda item 39, the General Assembly has before it draft resolution A/59/L.58. I now call on the representative of the Lao People's Democratic Republic to introduce the draft resolution on behalf of Association of South-East Asian Nations.

**Mr. Kittikhoun** (Lao People's Democratic Republic): I have the honour to introduce the draft resolution entitled "Strengthening emergency relief, rehabilitation, reconstruction and prevention in the aftermath of the Indian Ocean tsunami disaster" on behalf of the member countries of the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN) — namely, Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Viet Nam and my own country, the Lao People's Democratic Republic — as well as the following sponsors: Algeria, Andorra, Argentina, Australia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Belarus, Belgium, Bhutan, Bolivia, Canada, China, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Djibouti, Egypt, Estonia, Finland, France, Gabon, Germany, Greece, Guatemala, Haiti, Hungary, India, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Ireland, Italy, Jamaica, Japan, Kazakhstan, Kenya, Latvia, Liberia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, the Maldives, Mali, Malta, Mauritius, Mexico, Monaco, Mongolia, Morocco, Nepal, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Nicaragua, Norway, Pakistan, Peru, Poland, Portugal, the Republic of Korea, Romania, the Russian Federation, San Marino, Saudi Arabia, Senegal, Serbia and Montenegro, Slovenia, Somalia, South Africa, Spain, Sri Lanka, Sweden, Switzerland, the Syrian Arab Republic, Tajikistan, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Timor-Leste, Tunisia, Turkmenistan, Turkey, the United Kingdom, Uruguay, Uzbekistan and Yemen.

The earthquake and tsunami of 26 December 2004 was an unprecedented global catastrophe requiring an unprecedented global response. A disaster of that magnitude had never been experienced in the 60 years of the existence of the United Nations. That led ASEAN to request the resumption of this session of the General Assembly to mark our remembrance of the victims and to voice a common expression of condolence. The scale of the calamity also prompted ASEAN leaders to convene a special meeting in Jakarta on 6 January 2005, where they were joined by heads of Government and leaders of many countries and international organizations, including the United Nations, to seek to work together to respond to the urgent and immediate needs of communities severely affected by the earthquake and tsunami.

Against that backdrop, and on behalf of the member countries of ASEAN, I wish to take this opportunity to express our profound appreciation to the peoples and Governments represented here, as well as to non-governmental organizations and the citizens of the world for their tremendous outpouring of support and assistance in the aftermath of this calamity. ASEAN wholeheartedly expresses its gratitude for the prompt and strong support — moral, financial and otherwise — of the Governments, civil society, private sector and individuals of the international community to help affected countries to get back on their feet. The swift response of the international community and its continued support to those affected have indeed reflected the spirit of compassion and international solidarity in times of humanitarian catastrophes caused by severe natural disasters.

ASEAN also wishes to thank the Secretary-General for his direct and personal initiative to launch the Indian Ocean earthquake/tsunami 2005 flash appeal in Jakarta, which received an overwhelming response in Jakarta and at the ministerial-level meeting on humanitarian assistance to tsunami affected communities, which was held in Geneva on 11 January.

ASEAN commends the role of the United Nations — from the Secretary-General, at the very top, to Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator Jan Egeland and Special Coordinator Margareta Wahlström and all the dedicated officials involved from the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), the World Food Programme, UNICEF and other agencies. We also commend other international organizations, including the International Red Cross, for their support for efforts of Governments of the affected countries to address the disaster.

In addressing the recovery and reconstruction efforts, ASEAN underlines the medium- and long-term social, economic and environmental impact of the disaster on affected States, which undoubtedly requires a sustainable and unwavering response. It was

exceptional for the international media to maintain its coverage of the long-term impact of the tsunami in order to hold the attention of the international community on the tsunami cause. Once media attention fades, the international community at large may mistakenly believe that life is back to normal for all the affected communities, although that reality is a long, long way off.

Similarly, the international community needs to maintain its focus beyond the current emergency relief effort, in order to sustain the political will to support the medium- and long-term rehabilitation, reconstruction and risk-reduction efforts led by the Governments of affected countries. To that end, the heads of State and Government meeting in Jakarta proposed that the Secretary-General appoint a special representative and convene an international conference to address the medium- and long-term rehabilitation and reconstruction needs of the affected countries.

The devastating tsunami indeed teaches us painful and valuable lessons. If we do not derive the priceless lessons to be learned from the catastrophe and if we fail to take concrete steps, we will face the possibility of having to deal with an even grimmer situation in the future. In that connection, I would like to highlight some of the salient lessons we should consider.

The first lesson is that we can all be affected by disasters and that disasters can affect entire regions and spare neither the life nor property of anyone. The tsunami has directly affected 12 countries in the Indian Ocean and South-East Asian region, claiming thousands of lives, including those of visitors from 40 nations around world, and causing indescribable material damage. No kind of calamity, actual or potential, should be ignored or neglected. Never before in modern history have we witnessed the devastating scale of destruction caused by a natural disaster affecting a very vast area.

Secondly, international, regional and national organizations must enhance their coordination efforts so as to minimize the casualties caused by natural disasters. Effective coordination is an essential element of disaster preparedness and response for the entire United Nations system and for Governments, international financial institutions and non-governmental organizations. Efforts need to be made to promote complementarities and avoid duplication.

The third lesson is that countries need to work together at the subregional, regional and international levels ahead of time, instead of waiting until disaster strikes to respond. In that regard, further strengthening the rapid-response capacities for immediate humanitarian relief efforts under the auspices of the United Nations, including through possible standby arrangements, is worth taking into account. The World Conference on Disaster Reduction in Kobe, Japan, is expected to look into those issues thoroughly with a view to recommending appropriate action.

In the same vein, ASEAN emphasizes the urgent need for the establishment of a regional early warning system, particularly for tsunamis, in the Indian Ocean and South-East Asian region and notes the interest expressed by some Governments, bodies and organizations, including the Asian Disaster Preparedness Centre, in supporting the establishment of that system as part of regional and global instruments on disaster management and emergency response. Furthermore, we welcome the proposed convening of a regional ministerial meeting on regional cooperation with regard to a tsunami early warning system, to be held in Thailand on 28 January.

Lastly, reducing risk depends on effective communication and information-sharing. Disasters have shown that, in the absence of an open dialogue, valuable information and research from technical sectors are of no use. We need to strengthen the link between the scientific institutions and the national and local authorities in order to improve our reaction to disasters and to avoid human, economic and social losses from disaster.

Bearing this in mind, I now turn to the draft resolution before the Assembly. We would like to thank all delegations that cooperated closely with ASEAN in a very brief time frame to prepare this important draft resolution, as well as all those that, by sponsoring the draft resolution, join ASEAN and affected countries in voicing their sentiments and exhortations.

The draft resolution we are introducing today is inspired by the Declaration on Action to Strengthen Emergency Relief, Rehabilitation, Reconstruction and Prevention in the Aftermath of the Earthquake and Tsunami Disaster of 26 December 2004, which was issued at the end of the special ASEAN leaders' meeting in Jakarta on 6 January.

Before concluding, I wish to refer to the seventh preambular paragraph, which should read as follows:

> "*Welcoming* the recent announcement by the Paris Club creditors that they will not expect debt payments from affected countries that request such forebearance until the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund have made a full assessment of their reconstruction and financing needs as well as specific initiatives from countries on this issue."

The fifteenth preambular paragraph should read as follows:

> "*Noting* the outcome of the International Meeting to Review the Implementation of the Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States held in Mauritius, 10-14 January 2005."

Operative paragraph 14 should read as follows:

> "*Welcomes also* the fact that the World Conference on Disaster Reduction will discuss the issue of a global and regional tsunami early warning system as part of its agenda."

Regarding operative paragraphs 7 and 8, I would like to inform Member States that, as a result of intensive consultations between interested delegations, an agreed text has been reached, as seen in the present draft resolution now before the Assembly.

We in ASEAN share our leaders' belief that, through concerted efforts inspired by a spirit of compassion, we will prevail in overcoming this catastrophe and future catastrophes that may come our way. The draft resolution we present today is one of those instruments that will help us to prepare for the future.

Finally, ASEAN wishes to thank everyone for their support in turning up for this resumed General Assembly session and looks forward to their support of this important draft resolution, to be adopted by consensus.

**Mr. Jenie** (Indonesia): On behalf of the Government of the Republic of Indonesia and on behalf of those whose lives have been changed by the recent Indian Ocean tsunami, my delegation would like to thank you, Sir for this opportunity to address this resumed meeting of the fifty-ninth session of the General Assembly. The circumstances surrounding our meeting today emphatically underline its timeliness and relevance. In that regard, Indonesia associates itself with the statement made by the Permanent Representative of the Lao People's Democratic Republic, who spoke on behalf of the member countries of the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN).

Today's meeting comes on the heels of the most powerful submarine earthquake in recent memory off the coast of Sumatra on 26 December. While the death toll from that epic disaster is constantly being revised, it stands today at well over 160,000. Indonesia continues to calculate its human losses, mostly in its province of Aceh, which, to date, amount to more than 110,000. In addition, around 10,000 are missing and more than 700,000 displaced, their lives disrupted as they lost not only their homes, but, most sadly, their livelihood and are now living in temporary shelters.

However, we gratefully acknowledge that the challenge before us is not one that we face alone. In the face of this great human tragedy, all of us responded out of a profound sense of common humanity. There have been incredible demonstrations of love, compassion and deep caring from all quarters. There have also been large-scale aid donations and an unprecedented, extraordinary international response through humanitarian relief efforts.

At the head of all that is the United Nations, which has mobilized the international community to give generously and has been helping affected host countries to coordinate the relief efforts being provided. For that Indonesia sincerely expresses, through you, Mr. President, its deepest gratitude and appreciation. We join Secretary-General Kofi Annan in expressing the hope that this global outpouring of solidarity and generosity will be sustained in the long run.

While Indonesia is wholeheartedly grateful for the unwavering support and affection expressed by the international community, it is worth mentioning that people from all walks of life in Indonesia have also exhibited their full compassion and solidarity: from Adi, a student in elementary school in Solo who donated his piggybank savings, to Markus, a business man from North Sulawesi who sent boxes of food and blankets. The staff of Bank Indonesia donated their monthly salaries to their brothers and sisters in Aceh. Various individual and group initiatives — including

the voluntary assistance being provided by paramedics, as well as by consultants on children and construction workers from all over Indonesia — are being woven together to help rebuild Aceh. All of them are eagerly showing Indonesia's solidarity with their fellow countrymen in Aceh as members of Indonesia's big family.

While those relief efforts have returned some measure of normalcy to affected communities by ensuring the availability of various public facilities — such as health care, water and sanitation, education and other basic needs — it is important to note that such support must be maintained during the rehabilitation and reconstruction phases. Those elements of the restoration process require different approaches and facilities to adequately address the different needs of the victims, especially the 700,000 displaced persons in Aceh.

In that connection, efforts are being made involving the TNI — the Indonesian armed forces — local authorities, volunteers and the relevant United Nations agencies to set up 24 relocation centres to provide accommodation for the displaced. Those centres will logistically enable occupants to have greater access to humanitarian assistance. They will be set up in accordance with principles and requirements established by the United Nations and other humanitarian organizations and will involve various other stakeholders to ensure that an acceptable quality of life is possible in those facilities.

In collaboration with the United Nations, the Government has also established a joint disaster management centre in Jakarta in the Office of the Vice-President, Yusuf Kalla. The Coordinating Minister for People's Welfare is currently on the spot in Aceh coordinating relief operations. The main purpose of the centre is to assess needs and set priorities for the management and coordination of international relief efforts, which are expected to last for the next six to 12 months. That collaboration is intended to guarantee the proper and accountable management of aid from various national, regional and international resources.

To make certain that those communities are not subjected to a similar fate in the future, Indonesia firmly believes, as does the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN), that a regional early-warning system should be put in place to prevent the huge loss of life and property that resulted from December's tsunami. We therefore fully support the proposal for a regional tsunami early-warning centre for the Indian Ocean and the South-East Asia region, one similar to the Pacific Ocean warning network based in Hawaii. Had such a system been in place, thousands of lives would have been saved.

Similarly, during the meeting of the ASEAN Standing Committee that is currently taking place in Jakarta, it has been proposed that there should be an ASEAN humanitarian rapid-response regional institutional capacity to speedily mobilize and deploy civilian and military personnel in addressing emergency situations in ASEAN countries. That initiative is indeed a concrete step to follow up the Jakarta declaration of 6 January 2005.

In conclusion, in the midst of its current difficult situation, Indonesia welcomes, and is undoubtedly thankful for, the support of the international community. That solidarity will not only stay in the heart and memory of every Indonesian, but even now is proving to be an invaluable resource in our efforts to deal with the disastrous effects of the tsunami. We must indeed make permanent the culture of international solidarity that has emerged in response to this great tragedy. Working together must become the hallmark of future international relations. As our President, Mr. Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, has said, "When the crisis has passed, let us not go back to business as usual, only to become a solid community again when another disaster strikes."

**Mr. Goonatilleke** (Sri Lanka): The fifty-ninth session of the General Assembly has been resumed to consider agenda item 39 in the wake of the deadly tsunami that struck several countries in the Indian Ocean region.

Being far away from the earthquake zone, Sri Lanka had little or no reason to worry about such natural disasters, which cause catastrophic damage to earthquake-prone countries. In the living memory of Sri Lanka, we had never experienced the ferocity of nature in the form of a tsunami. In fact, even the very terminology did not exist in our vocabulary until that fateful Sunday, 26 December.

Sri Lanka is situated thousands of miles away from the epicentre of the deadly volcanic upheaval that shook Banda Aceh on that fateful day. Despite that, the coastal areas of the northern, eastern, southern and south-western parts of our country absorbed the full

brunt of the tsunami, which killed over 159,000 persons in the region, injured tens of thousands and displaced millions of people living all the way up to the eastern coast of Africa.

By now the world is aware that Sri Lanka was the second-most-affected country, after Indonesia. While we have yet to come up with the final figures, according to statistics we now have we know that the wall of sea water rushing towards our shore that day took the lives of 38,195 persons. The final toll is expected to exceed 40,000 lives. That is a massive figure for a small country like ours. Among the dead were countless children, possibly over 12,000. The killer waves also orphaned well over 1,000 children and left another 3,202 children with one parent.

If that death toll is staggering, the situation of those who survived is equally disturbing. Today we have approximately more than half a million displaced persons in camps, schools and other makeshift structures. Those people lost practically everything they possessed. Consequently, providing shelter, food, clean water, sanitation and health care to such a vast number of persons, spread out over a wide area of our coastal region, has become a monumental task for the Government.

Given their dire circumstances and the fact that they have to live on hand-outs, the physically weakened displaced population is likely to fall victim to vector- and water-borne diseases. Consequently, while digging for the dead and cleaning up debris, we also have to empty wells supplying drinking water, disinfect them and make such sources of water safe to consume so that we can hold at bay such water-borne diseases as dysentery and cholera. However, thanks to measures taken by the authorities concerned, we have succeeded in preventing an outbreak of epidemics.

Despite the inflow of relief supplies from many parts of the world, taking care of such a vast population is certainly not an easy task. The situation gets grimmer when we realize that providing for the displaced population is not going to end within a week's or month's time, but will require a much longer period until they are resettled, helped to rebuild their lives and made economically independent once again.

Resettlement and reconstruction is not going to be an easy task either. Almost 90,000 houses have been reduced to rubble and over 41,000 have been partially damaged. The first step is to move the displaced population from public buildings such as schools so that the children who were fortunate enough to survive can go back to school and mix and move with other children, thereby minimizing the effects of the terrible trauma they had to endure. That means that we require temporary shelter. Last week the Government made an urgent appeal for 50,000 tents. Meanwhile, the Government has to secure funds to provide permanent housing for the homeless and take steps to construct that housing in more secure locations. Translated into action, that means proper planning and an infusion of a considerable amount of capital as soon as possible.

The tsunami dealt a crippling blow to two vital sectors of our economy, namely, the fisheries industry and tourism in coastal areas. According to report No. 17 of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), over 19,000 fishing vessels were either destroyed or damaged. That represents a massive 66 per cent of our fishing fleet. As many as 7,500 fishermen died, and another 7,086 are still missing and presumed to be dead. In all, over 90,000 persons representing the fisheries sector have been displaced. The cost of repairs to or replacement of boats, repairs to fisheries harbours, ice plants, boat yards and so on is staggering. Even with a swift infusion of capital and the necessary equipment, it will take years for the fisheries industry to recover from the devastation caused by the tsunami. The damage suffered by the tourist sector is also rather high, running into millions of dollars. However, being a dynamic industry, coastal-based tourism will rebound within months, with robust investments. I am happy to say that recovery is already under way.

In addition to those two vital sectors of our economy, the destruction and damage caused to other infrastructure — such as schools, hospitals, roads, rail lines, bridges, power lines, drainage systems and telecommunication systems — is massive. It is estimated that the reconstruction and rehabilitation work will cost approximately $1.5 billion.

At a time when Sri Lankans were feeling that they were alone in their suffering, our spirits were lifted, having experienced the outpouring of sympathy and solidarity from the international community. First to come to our assistance was our neighbour India, another victim of the tsunami, which caused massive damage to its coastal regions and killed over 10,000 persons. Similarly, within days other countries too numerous to mention were also at our doorstep with

relief supplies, rescue and medical personnel and other assistance.

The United Nations went into action on the very day of the tsunami, and the Department of Humanitarian Affairs took immediate steps to assess the situation and arranged for humanitarian relief as quickly as possible. A whole host of friendly countries, numbering well over 50, international lending institutions, big and small private companies, international non-governmental organizations, religious institutions and individuals came forward with generous offers of help as the world had never witnessed before, in a common endeavour to bring succour and solace to victims in the affected countries. We owe all those countries, institutions and persons a deep debt of gratitude for coming to our assistance to meet the unfolding humanitarian crisis.

The pledges made thus far, both in Jakarta and Geneva, are quite generous and reassuring. What is now needed is to transform those pledges into cash and materials as swiftly as possible so that the reconstruction and rehabilitation process can begin in earnest and survivors can once again be self-reliant. Despite this unexpected occurrence, Sri Lanka is confident that this disaster will not come in the way of attaining our medium- and long-term development goals.

Financial assistance alone is not going to help the process of recovery. There is much more that can be done. I need not emphasize the fact that most of the affected countries also have considerable debt-servicing responsibilities. Speaking for Sri Lanka, our debts are in the region $10 billion. In fact, Sri Lanka had set aside $500 million in the current year's budget for debt servicing. With the unexpected havoc created by the tsunami and the material damage we have suffered, we will devote all available resources to the reconstruction effort, provided that donor countries and international lending institutions grant us debt-relief measures. In that regard, we are grateful to countries such as China for forgiving some of our debt. We are also grateful for the decision taken by the 19-member Paris Club to grant a temporary moratorium of up to one year on the repayment of debts.

Apart from aid and debt-relief measures, developed countries could also take other measures to grant us relief to cope up with the economic blow resulting from the natural disaster. One such measure would be to provide market access to the exports of those countries under concessionary terms for a specific period in order to accelerate the healing process.

Despite the extent of the devastation caused by the tragedy, both in human and material terms, I am happy to inform the Assembly that the reconstruction process in Sri Lanka is already in progress, under the personal supervision of President Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga. A national operations centre, which was swiftly established by the President, is being spearheaded by three task forces dealing with rescue and relief, rebuilding and logistics, and law and order. Those three task forces are headed by the country's most senior officials and are supported by representatives of the relevant ministries and departments. I am happy to say that, due to the dedicated work of the task force for rebuilding the nation, much headway has already been made. The President unveiled Sri Lanka's action plan on 17 January.

While we focus on the work of reconstruction and the rehabilitation of displaced persons, it is also important for us to request of the friends of Sri Lanka — who in a moment of great need came forward to pledge resources — that their assistance should reach the vital sectors of our economy as quickly as possible. Millions of displaced persons cannot expect to be confined to refugee camps for extended periods, and repairs to damaged infrastructure can also not be delayed for too long. The economies of affected countries need to be resurrected speedily to avoid spawning social and other threats that can follow disasters of this magnitude. Sri Lanka has every reason to believe that it can ride the crest of the wave and reach dry ground quickly, with the support and cooperation of the donor community.

Finally, I would like to conclude by thanking the United Nations and its associated agencies, friendly countries, international financial institutions, national and international non-governmental organizations, civil society organizations, international humanitarian organizations and private companies, as well as individuals, for the moral, material and financial support they have given us at a dark moment in our history. I would also like to express our sincere gratitude to the Secretary-General and other world leaders who rushed to the tsunami-devastated region to assess the situation first-hand and provide assistance. Lastly, Sri Lanka wishes to express its appreciation to

Indonesia for organizing an international conference within days after the disaster. We also thank ASEAN countries for spearheading the draft resolution that is now before the General Assembly.

**Mr. Chaimongkul** (Thailand): First of all, allow me to express my delegation's sincere appreciation for the timely convening of this resumed session of the General Assembly today. My delegation also wishes to align itself with the statement made earlier by the Permanent Representative of the Lao People's Democratic Republic on behalf of the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN).

The earthquake and tsunami of 26 December 2004 caused bereavement, pain and destruction to a massive extent. The magnitude of the calamity was indeed both unimaginable and unprecedented. Like other countries in Asia and throughout the world, Thailand has been profoundly moved by the great losses resulting from that incident. Over 5,300 persons lost their lives in Thailand alone, while many thousands more are still missing. In that regard, Thailand shares the pain and suffering of our friends around the world who have been affected by the disaster. We wish to offer our deepest condolences to all the victims and their families. At the same time, we also wish to express our most sincere gratitude to all who extended to us a hand of compassion, solidarity and assistance from the very beginning of this trying period.

Thailand has now moved from the post-disaster relief operations phase to the reconstruction phase. The priority has thus shifted from providing for basic needs such as food and medical supplies to the rehabilitation of livelihoods, infrastructure and the environment, the generation of income and providing psychological counselling to those who have been traumatized by the incident.

An initial assessment of the scale of the damage indicates that over half a billion dollars was lost as a consequence of the tsunami disaster in Thailand. In order to alleviate such losses, $700 million has been approved by the Thai Government to help the Thai people by providing temporary shelter, compensation for household damages, sanitary measures and health-care assistance. The Cabinet has also approved tax breaks for affected individuals and corporate entities. Other fiscal assistance includes debt restructuring, debt moratoria and lower interest rates and fees being offered by Thai commercial banks.

While being a victim of the disaster ourselves, we have never nonetheless attempted to do all we can, within our capacity and resources, to help our friends in the region who are in greater need. We have thus far contributed over $1 million towards the entire relief operation. Moreover, we are committed to staying the course by continuing to play a contributing role in coordinating relief and rehabilitation assistance to affected countries in the region. Our commitment also extends to ensuring that the people living along the shorelines of the Indian Ocean are able to lead safe and more predictable lives in the future.

While looking back at that sad event and trying to come to terms with what has happened, we also need to look ahead to the future and learn from our shortcomings. One major lesson learned from this incident is that prevention is the key. Indeed, we cannot remain complacent. Neither can we neglect our environment. It is also time to take collective action and cultivate a culture of prevention in order to prevent the preventable. To that end, on 28 and 29 January 2005, Thailand will host at Phuket a ministerial-level meeting on regional cooperation on a tsunami early-warning arrangement, to expedite the process of establishing an effective, functioning, real-time early-warning arrangement with a geographical footprint covering the Indian Ocean Rim region. The process of establishing a regional centre for such a task should build upon the experiences of existing bodies in the region.

With that in mind, at the special meeting of ASEAN leaders held in Jakarta on 6 January, Thailand proposed that the ASEAN Disaster Preparedness Centre — the ADPC — be enlarged and utilized as the core of prospective regional early-warning arrangements in the Indian Ocean and South-East Asia. It is our hope that the Phuket meeting will provide the needed political impetus towards that end. Having said that, Thailand fully recognizes the significant amount of financial resources required if we to realize our objective successfully. That is why we will propose in Phuket that a voluntary trust fund for regional early-warning arrangements in the Indian Ocean and South-East Asia be established at the earliest opportunity. As a demonstration of our commitment to that initiative, Thailand has pledged $10 million as seed money.

Having experienced this tragedy, we have learned a very expensive lesson: we need to work more closely together at all levels — nationally, regionally and globally — in order to be better prepared and more secure. Providing basic education to those who do not know, or know little, about the environment — and specifically about the grave consequences of tsunamis — could serve as a good basis for long-term prevention efforts. We have also learned that the international community is capable of coming together in the face of our common suffering. Thus, Thailand strongly believes that we should seize this moment of unity and translate the reservoir of political goodwill into concrete cooperative actions in dealing with the tsunami disaster and other types of natural hazards affecting our common future.

**Mr. Latheef** (Maldives): At the outset, allow me to express my delegation's sincere appreciation for the leadership shown by the leaders of the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN) in requesting a resumption of the fifty-ninth session of the General Assembly to consider the devastating effects of the earthquake and the subsequent tsunami that affected many countries in South and South-East Asia and in Africa on 26 December 2004. With more than 170,000 people already dead, the tsunami has caused a disaster of epic proportions. We therefore believe that this meeting of the Assembly is most timely and essential.

Allow me also to express the gratitude of the Government and the people of the Maldives for the central role that the United Nations is playing in providing humanitarian relief to the affected countries. The professionalism and swiftness with which the Organization reacted to this enormous disaster deserve much praise and admiration. The visit of the Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, to the worst-affected countries has been a reassuring gesture at this difficult time. His visit to our country, the Maldives, gave our people much comfort at this time of grief and distress. We thank the Secretary-General and his able team, headed by Mr. Jan Egeland, for the leadership they are providing in responding to the situation.

I should also like to join others in expressing our heartfelt and sincere sympathies and condolences to the Governments and the peoples of Indonesia, Sri Lanka, India, Thailand, Malaysia, Myanmar, Somalia and the Seychelles, as well as to other countries that lost citizens in this tragedy. We pray to almighty God to grant them the strength and courage to overcome this most terrible tragedy.

It is my profound pleasure to express, on behalf of the Government and the people of the Maldives, our deep gratitude and appreciation for the most generous and prompt assistance provided by friendly countries, in particular India, Pakistan, Japan, China and Australia, and many others, in the hour of great need and grief.

The tsunami swept the entire length and breadth of the Maldives, leaving behind a path of destruction that is unprecedented in our known history and piles of rubble as remnants of decades of development on a number of islands. The geophysical layout of the country may have saved the Maldives from a death toll higher than we actually suffered: 82 are confirmed dead, and 26 are missing and presumed dead.

Although that in itself is profoundly tragic and shocking to a population of fewer than 300,000 people, what is often overlooked is the fact that the destruction caused to the Maldives is not localized to one area but generalized to the entire nation, severely crippling the entire economy and socio-economic infrastructure. Out of a total of 199 inhabited islands, 53 were severely damaged, 13 of which had to be totally evacuated. One third of our entire population — some 100,000 people — were directly affected: their homes, livelihoods and accessibility to basic services were entirely or partially destroyed or damaged. More than 15,000 people were displaced.

National authorities, non-governmental organizations and members of the public joined hands with United Nations agencies and friendly countries in providing immediate relief and preventing an outbreak of disease as a result of damage to water and sanitation systems, disrupted living conditions, water contamination and inability to access health services.

The tsunami hit the tourism and fishing industries hard, damaging infrastructure and plunging the economy into deep disarray. More than 12 per cent of the fishing fleet is inoperable, ruining the primary livelihood assets of many families and communities. The salination of the freshwater aquifers on a number of islands and the erosion of topsoil have rendered a large part of the limited arable land unusable and unfit for agriculture.

In the tourism sector, out of 87 resorts, 19 were damaged and have been closed down for repairs. However, 54 resorts are in full operation, and we are trying hard to prevent cancellations. Nonetheless, in the wake of the disaster, the hotel occupancy rate has crashed to less than 30 per cent, compared with the full occupancy that is typical for this time of year. But we hope that with 54 resorts in full service, with the outbreak of an epidemic having been prevented and with emergency relief needs having been successfully addressed, travellers will find that visiting the Maldives is in itself a major contribution to the country's recovery efforts.

Only six days before the disaster, the Assembly decided to graduate my country from the list of least developed countries, recognizing its socio-economic development over the past two decades. At the time, the country enjoyed the highest per capita income and human development index in South Asia. Our gross national product was growing at a remarkable rate, and we were also among the few countries that were on track for achieving the Millennium Development Goals. We were about to be taken off the category of least developed countries when the tsunami struck. Within minutes, the livelihoods, hopes and aspirations of many were washed away into the sea and economic infrastructure such as harbours, schools, health centres and powerhouses were crushed to rubble. The tragedy reveals vividly how vulnerable our country is and how delicate our economy remains.

At the ASEAN leaders' meeting on 6 January, Mr. Maumoon Abdul Gayoom, President of the Republic of Maldives, described the situation of the country as follows:

> "Even before the tsunami struck, we had been the most vulnerable to the rising seas. In its aftermath, we have become the most crippled."

According to preliminary assessments, the total economic cost to the country will be well over $1 billion. A report that has just been issued by the Asian Development Bank warns that the absolute poverty level in the Maldives could increase to more than 50 per cent of its population as a result of the tsunami damage. It is imperative that assistance be extended to the Maldives to ensure that we can ward off a humanitarian crisis.

The response of the international community to the Secretary-General's flash appeal has been very positive. We are grateful for the help and support that have been extended to us already and are encouraged by the pledges that have been made by donor nations, agencies and international financial institutions.

The World Bank has been rating our track record among the top five in the efficient utilization of aid. The Government has established a board of trustees to ensure full transparency and accountability in the management of the disaster relief fund, with the full participation of the United Nations Resident Coordinator in the boardroom. The Assembly is aware that we have made very good use of the facilities extended earlier to us as a least developed country. Now, with this disaster, we have to turn to rebuilding our nation and aim at recovery plus. We call upon the international community to extend that assistance to us in a timely manner and to extend all possible assistance to the Maldives.

While we fully appreciate the decision of the Assembly to graduate us, given the circumstances that have befallen our country, we cannot but wonder about the practicality of graduation at this point in time. For graduation to take place, we would first need to restore our socio-economic development at least to pre-tsunami levels. Perhaps the Assembly may consider suspending the implementation of resolution 59/210 with regard to the graduation of the Maldives until conditions have improved. After working so hard to design a smooth transition strategy, we would not want to be graduated without reaping its full benefits, which would be counterproductive and not achieve the intended aims of resolution 46/206 of 1991 and resolution 59/209, which the Assembly adopted only last month.

My Government joins others in echoing the importance of establishing a tsunami early warning system in the Indian Ocean, the Caribbean and other regions of the world. Had such a system existed in the Indian Ocean region, the death and destruction caused by the tsunami would perhaps have been far less. But for the Maldives, where the highest point is barely 1.5 metres above sea level, an early warning system is just not enough. We need ways to provide safety to our people.

In that regard, we are embarking upon a safe-island programme, whereby displaced and exposed communities will be settled in larger and safer islands with better natural protection, enhanced coastal

defences against tidal surges and greater economic prospects. It would make little sense to resettle displaced communities again in islands where there is little environmental security or economic prospects. The programme will usher in a new paradigm of national development through a reduction in unit costs, the enhancement of economies of scale and the reinforcement of environmental resilience. It will also result in a more rational and sustainable development.

We assure the international community that the assistance we receive for relief, rehabilitation and reconstruction will be put to good use to help the country bounce back to pre-tsunami conditions. We intend to make rapid strides towards getting back on course to achieving the Millennium Development Goals by the earliest feasible dates.

**Mr. Sen** (India): In the early hours of the morning of Sunday, 26 December 2005, disaster struck. A massive earthquake off the west coast of northern Sumatra triggered powerful tsunamis that, in a matter of hours, wreaked untold damage to people living in the coastal areas and islands of India, Sri Lanka, Maldives, Thailand, Indonesia, Malaysia, Myanmar, Seychelles, Somalia and some other countries.

The death toll in India itself has been estimated at 10,700, with over 5,600 others missing. At a special meeting of leaders convened by the Association of Southeast Asian Nations in the aftermath of the natural disaster, Mr. K. Natwar Singh, External Affairs Minister of India, said:

> "Existing vocabularies are inadequate to describe the intensity and magnitude of the horrendous catastrophe that hit a dozen countries of the Indian Ocean. The light went out in so many homes in so many countries in so short a span of time — only in a few minutes."

India did not avail itself of external assistance in dealing with the crisis. However, it deeply appreciated the offers of help that poured in from several countries, the United Nations and non-governmental organizations. We would like to add our tribute to the tributes paid to the United Nations and to the personal commitment and dedication of the Secretary-General. Those spontaneous offers of support and solidarity at a time of crisis were critical in assuring the people of India that they were not alone in dealing with the enormity of the loss they had suffered.

In a sense, the foundations of the United Nations have been strengthened not just by what it did in coordinating relief efforts, but above all by the colossal international solidarity shown by ordinary people throughout the world and by their contributions, and reflected in the actions of their Governments.

India's experience of handling natural disasters has enabled it to develop well-defined mechanisms for disaster management at all levels. The lessons we learned from the Orissa cyclone of 2000, the Gujarat earthquake of 2001 and other disasters have helped effect a paradigm shift in our approach to disaster management. That has proceeded from the conviction that development cannot be sustainable unless disaster mitigation is built into the development process at all levels. As a result, we were able to respond to the disaster promptly through a massive effort launched by a well-oiled machinery, experienced and trained personnel, and with the resources required to successfully deal with the unexpected disaster within our existing capacity.

It also became clear to us that, while our situation was serious, there were other affected countries where the need for immediate relief through the international community was even greater. Indian air force planes and Indian naval ships have formed an almost continuous bridge of relief assistance to Sri Lanka and the Maldives in solidarity and friendship. Many hundred sorties have been flown to deliver relief supplies and for search and rescue. The planes and ships have also brought field hospitals, doctors and paramedical staff. Naval ships have completed surveys of Galle and Colombo harbours and are helping to restore telecommunications and communications in Trincomalee. Indian naval ships have similarly delivered relief supplies and set up field hospitals in Aceh in Indonesia.

In India, the worst impact of the tsunamis was on the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. With 1,300 island territories, with their fragile ecosystems, India has a special empathy with the needs, situation and vulnerabilities of small island developing States. At the recently concluded International Meeting of Small Island Developing States in Mauritius, India therefore outlined, and discussed bilaterally with many of the States, an expanded programme of cooperation to address those vulnerabilities. The Mauritius Declaration and the strategy document emphasized the need for that and, in that context, the need to set up

early-warning systems. It will be recalled that, as early as 1994, the Barbados Programme of Action had noted the importance of early-warning systems and, therefore, of technology — telecommunication links and satellite facilities.

In India, cyclones used to wreak havoc in the coastal regions of Andhra Pradesh. However, early-warning systems using remote sensing and satellite technology have now stopped such happenings. Furthermore, in response to the tsunami disaster, the Government has announced an allocation of several billion rupees for putting in place tsunami early-warning systems. With our capacities in the field of sensors and satellites, we are prepared to cooperate with the international community, particularly the Indian Ocean and South-East Asian region, for establishing such a system.

India was part of the tsunami core group, initially consisting of the United States, Japan, Australia and India, established to facilitate a coordinated effort to deal with the disaster. We were invited because we had the military assets to help in a concrete manner with the relief efforts. Yesterday, in the context of the core group's operations in Banda Aceh, Indonesia, Secretary-General Kofi Annan, stated,

> "I must say that the core group which the United States put together, made up of the United States, Australia, India, Japan, Canada and Singapore, had made a real difference. Without their heavy lifting and clearing up for us to move in, it would have been a logistical nightmare. The roads were destroyed, airports were not easily usable, but they have been extremely helpful in doing that, and making sure with helicopters we could reach those who were difficult to reach. So the Government had allowed us to go in."

In the immediate aftermath of the disaster, the effort was on search, evacuation and relief. This has now shifted to the establishment of communications networks, the prevention of outbreaks of epidemics, and relief and rescue operations in the far-flung Nicobar group of islands off India. Supplies to inaccessible areas have been air-dropped. For both the Andaman and Nicobar groups of islands, an integrated relief command has been constituted for effective action. There is a calamity relief fund for immediate expenditure. There is an existing mechanism of eight battalions of paramilitary forces equipped as specialist search and rescue teams, which has been extremely useful in dealing with the aftermath of the tsunami.

Within the first week after the disaster itself, the Government of India incurred an expenditure of $250 million for the relief and rehabilitation effort within India and a substantial amount in neighbouring countries. It has also given due importance to alleviating the psychological impact of the disaster through trauma counselling, the early reopening of schools and access to television sets. Fortunately, resource mobilization in India itself has been successful, with contributions from the Indian public — from ordinary people — amounting to at least $120 million, of which $100 million had gone to the Prime Minister's National Relief Fund alone by 10 January.

The focus now is on the reconstruction and rehabilitation phase. It is axiomatic that those who suffered the most were the poor, particularly those whose dependence on the sea made the crisis so much harder to bear. The Government of India, in cooperating with the United Nations and the international community, is committed to rehabilitating those affected by the crisis at the earliest possible date. As John Ruskin so movingly said, "this green tide that eddies by my threshold is full of floating corpses".

The response is one of sustained political will and international solidarity to carry out reconstruction, restore the livelihoods of the living and protect them, to the extent possible, from future disasters. In this effort, the role of the United Nations, including agencies like the United Nations Development Programme, and multilateral institutions, including the World Bank, in implementing quick, creative and concrete programmes is critical. In the words of the Indian Sanskrit saying from many thousand years ago, "*Vasudhaiva Kutambhakam*" — "the world is one family".

**Mr. Rastam** (Malaysia): My delegation welcomes the resumption of the fifty-ninth session of the General Assembly today. My delegation, representing both a country affected by the tsunami and a country member of the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN), fully associates itself with the statement made by the Lao People's Democratic Republic on behalf of ASEAN.

Malaysia believes that the resumption of the session marks another crucial step in the follow-up

efforts undertaken by the international community, led by the United Nations, to address the medium- and long-term humanitarian, rehabilitation and reconstruction needs of the affected countries. We hope that the General Assembly will reach consensus on the draft resolution introduced by the sponsors.

My delegation would like to reiterate its sincere condolences and deep sympathy to the Governments and the peoples of all the affected countries for the tragic loss of life and the devastating socio-economic, psychological and environmental impact of the unprecedented tsunami disaster. We also extend similar sentiments to the Governments and the peoples of countries whose citizens perished or suffered injury or loss as a result of the disaster. We would also like to take this opportunity to express sincere appreciation and gratitude to all who have sent messages of sympathy and condolence to Malaysia and offered assistance at this traumatic time.

For Malaysia, the fact that the tsunami had affected us came as a national shock. The immediate priority of the Government has been to ensure the restoration of normalcy to the affected areas. Appropriate assistance has been provided to the victims. In Malaysia, 68 people died and about 8,000 people were displaced. Six Malaysians died in neighbouring countries, and a few remain missing. The financial burden of dealing with the effects of this disaster is quite heavy for Malaysia. But the Government can cope with the situation. Malaysia feels that most of the other affected countries deserve more immediate attention, and we are doing our part to assist them, too.

Malaysia has dispatched humanitarian, medical and search-and-rescue teams, with supplies, heavy equipment and helicopters, to Aceh. A team of Malaysian volunteer doctors and medical staff was among the first to reach Banda Aceh immediately after the disaster struck. The Royal Malaysian Air Force has utilized C-130 and CN-235 aircraft to ferry medicine, medical supplies and communications equipment. The Royal Malaysia Navy deployed a ship carrying 500 tons of humanitarian aid, including food, baby food, drinking water, medicine and medical supplies, as well as heavy equipment, including two bulldozers, three excavators and six three-ton trucks to Aceh to assist the people in the affected areas there.

Malaysian airports have also been used as staging points for the delivery of goods and other materials to the affected countries, especially Indonesia. Malaysia has also set up an Asian tsunami disaster fund to enable the Malaysian people and the corporate sector to contribute money for the relief of tsunami victims in other countries. So far, more than 12 million ringgit in cash, including a 5 million ringgit contribution from the Government of Malaysia, has already been extended to Indonesia, Maldives and Sri Lanka. As of 14 January, public contributions for domestic tsunami victims have exceeded 53 million ringgit.

It is not entirely possible to prevent natural disasters from occurring. However, a lot can be done to mitigate their devastating effects. In this regard, it is necessary to set up early warning systems that focus not only on tsunamis, but also on other equally destructive natural disasters. The scale of the recent tragedy might not have been as enormous had the appropriate systems been in place. For now, Malaysia and many other countries do not have such alert systems. We are ready to extend our fullest cooperation and take part in any initiative aimed at providing the necessary capabilities in this matter.

Malaysia also looks forward to learning from and working closely with other countries and international bodies that have expertise in early warning systems. Malaysia is fully aware of the high costs involved in setting up such infrastructure; it may in fact be prohibitive to many developing countries. We believe that only the United Nations can pool the resources, expertise and capacity to undertake such a massive endeavour in the region. As such, Malaysia is of the view that the United Nations must be fully involved if any such initiative is to succeed. Malaysia also hopes that the developed countries will show equal commitment in cooperating to establish an effective regional natural disaster monitoring system.

At the national level, the Government of Malaysia has approved an initial allocation of 19 million ringgit to establish an early warning system for the country. The operational cost is estimated at 3.5 million ringgit per year. However, the Government has yet to decide on the type of system to be used. We are now gathering information from countries that have more experience in dealing with catastrophes caused by tsunamis.

In addition to the establishment of early warning systems, Malaysia is convinced that there are certainly many ways of alleviating the hardships of the tsunami-affected countries and assisting them in their gigantic tasks of reconstruction. One concrete proposal relates to the cancellation or review of their international debts. Malaysia hopes that countries in a position to do so will seriously consider taking that far-reaching step of noble statesmanship in the name of humanitarianism.

**Mr. Swe** (Myanmar): At the outset, my delegation would like to thank you, Mr. President, for the timely convening of this meeting of the General Assembly in the aftermath of the earthquake and tsunami disaster of 26 December, which caused massive devastation and a human tragedy of vast proportions in the coastal States of the Indian Ocean rim.

My delegation fully associates itself with the statement made by the Permanent Representative of Lao People's Democratic Republic, who spoke on behalf of the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN).

I also wish to join preceding speakers in expressing our heartfelt sympathy to the victims, their families and the Governments of the countries affected by the tsunami disaster. My delegation also wishes to express its appreciation to the international community for its prompt response and outpouring of support. The unprecedented scale of the tragedy has unified the countries of the world as never before. Countries across the globe shared the grief and demonstrated solidarity and support for the affected countries in various ways. That response has vividly demonstrated the increasingly globalized nature of the world. The active role of the United Nations and the untiring efforts of its agencies, such as the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, UNICEF and the United Nations Development Programme, in coordinating and assisting relief measures also deserve our high commendation.

Located in the geographical proximity of the epicentre, Myanmar did not entirely escape the effect of the tsunami. However, because of its unique topographical features, Myanmar was fortunate to emerge with minimal damage in comparison to other, seriously affected countries in our region. The waves generated by the earthquake hit coastal areas in Taninthayi, Yangon, Bago, Ayeyawady and Rakhine states. The earthquake even affected areas as far as Shan state, causing several buildings to collapse. The earthquake and the tsunami resulted in the loss of lives and property. The toll stands at 59 dead, 3 missing and 43 injured. Nearly 600 houses along the coast were destroyed, leaving more than 3,000 persons homeless.

In the wake of the disaster, the authorities of Myanmar lost no time in responding. A team headed by the Minister for Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement, which includes officials from the Ministry of Health and medical specialists, was dispatched to the worst hit areas to provide necessary assistance. Relief goods, including food, clothing and medical supplies, were delivered expeditiously. Simultaneously, help and relief supplies were provided to affected communities in other states and divisions. Priority was accorded to relief efforts. Special attention was given to the provision of safe drinking water and medicine to prevent the outbreak of epidemics. Authorities at various administrative levels have been working together with organizations such as the Red Cross, the Auxiliary Fire Brigade, the Union Solidarity and Development Organization and the Maternal and Child Welfare Association to assist in relief efforts. Various United Nations agencies in Myanmar are also providing valuable support. Due to those timely relief measures and in view of the minimal impact, we have been able to mitigate and contain the effects of the disaster.

Myanmar is grateful to those friendly countries and international organizations that have contributed to disaster relief funds in our country. In that regard, we would like to place on record our appreciation to the People's Republic of China, Japan and others for their generous contributions.

Myanmar stands in full solidarity with other affected countries. Therefore, while my country was affected by the disaster, we feel that the more seriously affected countries deserve the priority attention and assistance of the international community. In responding to that tragic disaster, we should join hands not only to provide emergency relief but also to extend sustained assistance for medium- and long-term programmes for the rehabilitation and the reconstruction of the devastated areas. In that regard, I wish to stress the importance of the leadership role and the request of the country concerned in establishing

partnerships and in implementing national programmes for humanitarian assistance.

More important, we must also work together to plan for the future in order to avoid the loss of lives and property if such a natural disaster strikes again. Recent disasters have reminded us that nature is unpredictable and that we need to be better prepared. Monitoring, assessment and response capabilities must be enhanced. Our painful experience of this catastrophe has highlighted the urgent need to accelerate our collective efforts to develop a regional early warning system in the region that would effectively reduce our vulnerability to tsunamis and other natural disasters.

The earthquake and the tsunami have brought us all together. The challenge before us is indeed daunting, but it is a challenge that, by working together, we can successfully meet. My delegation stands ready to work with other members of ASEAN and our partners to that end.

**Mr. Hoscheit** (Luxembourg) (*spoke in French*): At the outset, I would like to associate myself with the thanks addressed to you, Mr. President, for convening this meeting of the General Assembly.

I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union. The acceding countries Bulgaria and Romania; the candidate countries Turkey and Croatia; the countries of the Stabilization and Association Process and potential candidates Albania, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Serbia and Montenegro align themselves with this statement.

Let me first convey the European Union's deepest condolences to the Governments and peoples of the countries that were affected directly or indirectly by the consequences of the earthquake and the tsunamis that hit the Indian Ocean and South-East Asian region, as well as parts of East Africa, on 26 December.

Citizens of 50 countries died in the tsunami disaster. The countries of the European Union were not spared. Thousands of our citizens died or are missing alongside tens of thousands from the countries of the region. We wish also to express our thanks and gratitude to the authorities and peoples of the affected countries, who provided assistance to the citizens of our countries in the stricken areas and facilitated their repatriation. Millions of citizens from throughout Europe expressed their sympathy and solidarity on Wednesday, 5 January, by observing three minutes of silence in memory of the many victims.

I also wish to extend our thanks to the United Nations family, and in particular to Under-Secretary-General Jan Egeland and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, and to pay tribute to the work they have undertaken under the guidance of our Secretary-General by reacting so promptly to that unprecedented disaster and by meeting the emergency needs of the countries and peoples concerned.

In the wake of the devastating catastrophe, the international community's reaction — both by Governments and by civil society, including non-governmental organizations and private persons — has been swift and generous. As early as 5 January, the United Nations launched the flash appeal for the Indian Ocean earthquake-tsunami at a special summit of the heads of State and Government of the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN) in Jakarta. Five days later, at the donors conference held in Geneva on 11 January, pledges of assistance were made by representatives of Member States. As of today, close to 75 per cent of the appeal's funding requirements have been met. Those generous contributions and pledges will be remembered as among the fastest responses ever to an emergency appeal.

It is now our common responsibility to continue to live up to our commitments and to deliver on our pledges. To date, the total commitments of the European Union and its member States stand at over €1.5, or approximately $2 billion, in public assistance. That exceptional effort will cover immediate humanitarian needs arising in the disaster-affected areas and support longer-term reconstruction and development work. In that connection, it is important to ensure that the resources released in the context of recent events will indeed complement development commitments already made and that other emergencies will not be forgotten.

The European Union will continue to support the United Nations in the face of that enormous challenge in both the short and the long terms. In that context, I reaffirm the European Union's full and unwavering support for the essential role played by the United Nations in coordinating the ongoing efforts on the ground. Close and sustained cooperation will be maintained between the European Union, the United

Nations funds and programmes, and the coordinating services of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, as well as with Special Coordinator Margareta Wahlstrom.

The European Union also wishes to contribute to the strengthening of the United Nations role in humanitarian response. In that respect, various options can be considered and deserve to be studied with attention. Within the European Union, several initiatives — including the creation of an international humanitarian force — have been proposed by States members. Those will be the subjects of intense work in the weeks to come within the European Union's bodies and in the framework of the United Nations, as laid out in the draft resolution before us.

Luxembourg's Minister for Development Cooperation and Humanitarian Action, Mr. Jean-Louis Schiltz, and the European Commissioner for Humanitarian Aid, Mr. Louis Michel, travelled to the affected region on 1 January. Luxembourg's Prime Minister, Mr. Jean-Claude Juncker, in his capacity as acting President of the European Council of Ministers, and the President of the European Commission, Mr. José Manuel Barroso, joined the leaders of the ASEAN countries in the immediate aftermath of the disaster to assure them of the solidarity of the States members and citizens of the European Union. At the donors conference in Geneva, the representative of the European Union made it clear that the Union's solidarity will not falter and will continue beyond the initial emergency phase.

We must indeed look to the future. Ministers of the 25 member States, meeting on 7 January in Brussels, reaffirmed the European Union's long-term commitment to assisting the affected countries and communities through successive phases, from humanitarian assistance to reconstruction and rehabilitation. Let there be no doubt about our long-term commitment to helping the affected countries to overcome the challenges they face.

A comprehensive financial aid package of the European Union is being prepared in close cooperation between member States and the European Commission. Indeed, on 31 January, the European Union ministers will meet again to consider all medium- and long-term measures envisaged by the Union and its member States with a view to establishing an operational action plan.

Let me also reiterate that the European Union places particular importance on capacity-building efforts in the field of prevention, preparedness and mitigation of natural disasters. It is crucial that the necessary technological and financial means be made available to prevent, to the extent possible, future natural disasters of this magnitude and their devastating consequences. The European Union welcomes the initiative taken by the Government of Germany to host a third conference on early warning systems in the course of this year.

Following upon the commitment it made in Jakarta, the European Union will actively support efforts to establish an early warning system in the Indian Ocean and South-East Asian region. The World Conference on Disaster Reduction, which starts today in Kobe, Japan, will allow for a first exchange of views on how to proceed towards that goal.

We all continue to witness the tragic consequences of the brutal unleashing of the forces of nature. Over the past weeks, the international community has reacted collectively with an admirable display of solidarity. The Assembly may rest assured that the European Union and its member States stand ready to sustain their efforts.

**Mr. Sow** (Guinea) (*spoke in French*): I have the honour and the great privilege to speak on behalf of the Group of African States in my capacity as its Chairman for the month of January.

At the outset, I should like to express to you, Mr. President, our full gratitude and appreciation for the swift convening of the General Assembly in plenary meeting to consider agenda item 39, entitled "Strengthening of the coordination of humanitarian and disaster relief assistance of the United Nations, including special economic assistance". I should also like to thank the Permanent Representative of the Lao People's Democratic Republic, who, on behalf of the Association of South-East Asian Nations, was the initiator of this timely meeting.

During the previous debate on agenda item 39 at the fifty-ninth session, held last November, we considered the reports of the Secretary-General on international cooperation on humanitarian assistance in the field of natural disasters (A/59/374) and on strengthening the coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance of the United Nations (A/59/93). The principles of disaster prevention and

management set out in those reports are even more relevant to us following the horrific consequences of the tsunami that swept through South-East Asia and several African countries.

The tsunami of 26 December 2004 in the Indian Ocean caused worldwide grief and a global tragedy by striking eight Asian countries with incredible violence, sending unprecedented shockwaves around the globe. Destroying everything in its path, the raging sea caused — according to statistics that unfortunately are still not final — nearly 170,000 deaths, with hundreds of thousands of missing persons, including nearly 10,000 tourists from Europe, the United States and many other countries. The deadly swath of the destructive tsunami even affected the east coast of the African continent, where there were hundreds of dead and missing and several coastal villages devastated.

On behalf of the African countries, I would like once again to express our heartfelt condolences and sympathies to the Governments, peoples and families of the victims of the disaster.

Africa welcomed the appropriate and swift response of the international community and of Governments, private groups and the general public in dealing with this disaster and in helping the people, countries and families affected. At the initiative of its leaders, the international community immediately mobilized its energies and resources to concretely demonstrate its sympathy and its solidarity with the victims.

In that context, the African Group, in considering the item on our agenda, cannot fail to emphasize the necessity and urgency of seeking solutions and comprehensive and lasting responses to the challenges posed by vulnerability to natural disasters. We believe it is now crucial to agree on measures that can strengthen emergency relief, recovery, reconstruction and prevention and to vigorously address all threats related to natural disasters — not only seismic tsunami waves, but also storms, cyclones, hurricanes, drought, deforestation and the locusts that devastate certain regions of the world, including Africa, with increasing frequency. Special attention must also be accorded to global warming, which is leading to an inexorable rise in sea level, threatening nearly 100 million people living at sea level.

To ensure the success of our work, the Assembly must firmly rely on the relevant recommendations already endorsed in the past and on those resulting from the International Meeting for the 10-Year Review of the Barbados Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States, held in Mauritius. We also place great hope in the World Conference on Disaster Reduction, which began its work today in Kobe, Japan. Undoubtedly, the Kobe Conference will serve as a framework for assessing the implementation of the Yokohama Strategy and for updating the guiding framework on disaster prevention for the twenty-first century, while defining activities necessary to carry out the Plan of Implementation of the World Summit on Sustainable Development.

Right now, it is highly desirable that we immediately find ways and means to enable us to swiftly implement the proposal made in Mauritius by the Secretary-General recommending the swift implementation of a 'global early-warning system that would cover all regions of the world. For, at this time, as Kofi Annan has so rightly pointed out, we need to think in global terms and plan measures commensurate with the risks.

Mindful of the colossal needs facing the region affected by the tsunami, we appeal to the international community and to all donors to maintain and strengthen their beneficial support throughout the recovery and reconstruction phase. We hope that the great solidarity and generosity expressed at this time of difficult trial will be extended to other political or humanitarian crises.

Finally, the African Group is determined to make a positive contribution to the thinking process now under way with a view to achieving consensus on the draft resolution submitted for our consideration and finding a collective, consistent and lasting solution to the challenge of natural disasters.

**Mr. Suazo** (Honduras) (*spoke in Spanish*): With all due respect, I cannot begin my statement without requesting that the Assembly observe a minute of silence on behalf of the hundreds of thousands of people who lost their lives in this natural disaster.

*The members of the General Assembly observed a minute of silence.*

**Mr. Suazo** (Honduras) (*spoke in Spanish*): At the outset, I wish to express, on behalf of the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean, our sorrow and

condolences to the countries affected by this natural disaster.

I have the honour to speak on behalf of the Group of Latin American and Caribbean States on agenda item 39, "Strengthening of the coordination of humanitarian and disaster relief assistance of the United Nations, including special economic assistance". We thank the Secretary-General for his recent and current reports and for submitting document A/59/93, on strengthening the coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance of the United Nations.

As last year drew to a close, the Latin American and Caribbean countries could not have imagined, at a time of deep religious feeling and of hope for the new year, that 2004 would end with a disaster of such tremendous proportions.

Our region has had its share of natural disasters, which have become more numerous recently and which have proved to be more destructive than war and civil strife. But they have never come close to the devastation caused by the tsunami disaster, which caused hundreds of thousands of deaths in a few hours, destroyed homes, crops and businesses, and set back economic development in the affected States by many decades. Those States are also facing the threat of pandemic diseases as a result of the flooding.

The international community responded speedily. However, given the magnitude of the disaster, Governments were physically unable to respond adequately. As an example of the scope of the tragedy, often, when aeroplanes arrived with humanitarian assistance, the land itself had completely disappeared.

Natural disasters are unavoidable and rarely foreseeable, and that is why they wreak such terrible destruction. But the devastation they cause can be prevented through the use of early warning mechanisms, and, if we take strategic long-term measures to effectively eradicate poverty, safeguard the environment and promote living conditions in urban areas, their effects can be mitigated. We believe that international assistance to such areas must continue and increase.

The importance of the Barbados Programme of Action — a milestone in terms of sustainable development, in particular for small island developing States — means that it deserves particular consideration on our part. Our region welcomes the Mauritius Declaration reaffirming the validity of the Programme of Action as a road map that provides the basic framework for the sustainable development of small island States.

The Group welcomes the increasing coordination between the United Nations system, international agencies and other regional institutions, which jointly responded immediately to that humanitarian emergency.

The Group of Latin American and Caribbean States also shares the concern expressed in recent publications as to the decrease in emergency relief funds once the interest of the public has waned and the media has shifted its attention to other disasters. Pledges are withdrawn, relief organizations move on and reconstruction projects are abandoned. We heard it said recently that the Millennium Development Goals are equal for all; but the ways and means available to achieve them are not.

The Group wishes to express its continued solidarity and support for the affected peoples and Governments of the Indian Ocean and pledges to assist them in the years to come as the rebuild their lives.

Finally, the Group of Latin American and Caribbean countries supports the draft resolution contained in document A/59/L.58, entitled "Strengthening emergency relief, rehabilitation, reconstruction and prevention in the aftermath of the Indian Ocean tsunami disaster".

**Mr. Kazykhanov** (Kazakhstan): I have the honour to address the General Assembly today on behalf of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, the People's Republic of China, the Republic of Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic, the Russian Federation, the Republic of Tajikistan and the Republic of Uzbekistan.

We commend the States members of the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN) for their initiative to convene this plenary meeting of the fifty-ninth session devoted to the recent tragic event that literally shook the world.

Our countries were profoundly saddened to learn of the massive loss of life and destruction caused by the powerful earthquake and devastating tsunami that struck the western Pacific and Indian Ocean last December. Our thoughts and prayers remain with the

people in the region and with those in many other countries who have lost their loved ones.

The Governments of the States members of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization have extended their sincere and heartfelt condolences to the Governments of the tsunami-stricken countries.

What happened on 26 December 2004 was an unprecedented disaster of global dimensions. The tsunami which struck the Indian Ocean nations was the worst natural disaster in history. For millions of people in the 12 countries affected, spanning two continents, and for tens of thousands of visitors from 40 nations around the world, it has caused a deep psychological trauma that will take a long time to heal.

For the United Nations itself, this has been the largest natural disaster to which the Organization has had to respond in the 60 years of its existence. The Organization has launched one of the biggest relief operations ever to assist the tsunami-stricken societies of South and South-East Asia. Ever since the disaster struck, the Organization has been on the front lines with the countries of the region, which have been very actively engaged in the process.

We commend the tireless efforts of the Secretary-General in mobilizing international assistance to the directly affected countries. Indeed, this unprecedented global catastrophe requires an unprecedented global response. We believe that the United Nations will continue to play a leading role in this process, working with the entire international community.

The goodwill and concern expressed around the world have been enormous. Governments have made pledges and contributions and expeditiously moved their assets, aircraft, equipment and goods into the region, providing much-needed relief to its suffering peoples.

As for the States members of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, they have contributed, and continue to contribute, to the common cause of providing assistance to the countries affected by the disaster, including humanitarian and financial aid.

Driven by compassion, by human feeling, State institutions, public organizations and ordinary people from all countries have been making their own contributions to the funds established to provide assistance to the victims of this natural disaster. At the same time, we share the view that, considering the sheer magnitude of the crisis, no agency or country is capable of dealing with it alone, and that we need to coordinate and pool our efforts to ensure that our intervention has the maximum impact. To that end, a great deal of money and effort will be required, for an extended period.

This global catastrophe has triggered debates among scientists and politicians on how to put in place a more effective early warning system to deal with this kind of situation. Some 2,000 international experts and officials from about 150 countries are currently in Kobe, Japan, to participate in the World Conference on Disaster Reduction, whose timing turned out to be so very sad indeed.

We expect that, under such overwhelming circumstances, the conference will be able to identify those functions that must be enhanced in order to set up regional mechanisms for surveillance, early warning, assessment and prevention of natural disasters.

In this regard, the States members of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization believe that the draft resolution on establishing regional mechanisms on surveillance, prevention and assessment of severe natural disasters, submitted by the People's Republic of China for consideration and adoption at the Kobe Conference, could truly promote international and regional cooperation on disaster reduction. We urge Member States to provide valuable support for that proposal.

We support the draft resolution entitled "Strengthening emergency relief, rehabilitation, reconstruction and prevention in the aftermath of the Indian Ocean tsunami disaster", submitted by ASEAN, and expect that the General Assembly will adopt that important document by consensus.

In conclusion, I should like to assure the Assembly that the States members of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization will continue to do their best to support efforts to provide emergency relief assistance for disaster-stricken countries in the western Pacific Ocean and the Indian Ocean.

*The meeting rose at 1 p.m.*